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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Walking Injuries

There are many common injuries in people who walk. Particularly in those who are occasional walkers. Those of you who believe yourselves to be of adequate health sometimes find that after walking longer distances, uphill, downhill, or on a sidehill, that you have painful new body parts that you didn't know you even had.

For example, you go away for the weekend or a holiday break and end up venturing off to discover the surrounding countryside and hills. You end up taking a 'short' 3-4 hour stroll, using a completely different sets of muscles, which may result in one or more of the following: upper and middle buttock pain, hip pain, low back ache, achilles tendonitis, patellar tendonitis, shin splints, plantar fasciitis, and/or thigh and hamstring pains. Sometimes, the pains may only become noticeable weeks later. Most of these injuries are preventable given correct stretching and a sensible build up or training plan to hill and distance walking.

One very common cause of walking injuries is when you walk on a trail or road that has a slight angle to it, typically for water drainage. Due to the angle, unsymmetrical pressure or stress is put on certain joints, muscles, and ligaments in your feet, ankles, knees, hips, and lower back.

Steep downhill walks can really work certain muscles, the fast twitch muscles, in the quadriceps or thighs. This can result in a very deep aching in the front of the thighs the next day. As well, walking downhill increases the pressure in the joint under your kneecap. This results in you feeling an achy pain under you kneecap that is aggravated by walking down stairs even weeks later.

Steep uphill walks mean raising the toes higher, which overworks the muscles at the front of your shin. This can give rise to shin splints.

You may even have pre-existing problems with your feet that predispose you to having injuries like the ones I described above. This is typically called "pronation" or fallen arches. This should be corrected with the use of a custom orthotic that holds your foot in the correct position while you walk, stand, or run. In fact, foot pronation is so common that every week I prescribe orthotics for patients in my office.

In summary, before you plan on going for a long walk or starting a walking or running program, talk to your chiropractor about what stretches would help prevent an injury. As well, have him or her check your feet and shoes for fallen arches. Finally, pick a route that has a flat surface and does not have too much uphill or downhill.